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Polar bear ambassador seeks help from peers

By Kirk Lang
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Westporter Sam Gault, through Gault Inc., has donated countless funds to a myriad of local organizations over the years. Now however, he is looking to make a difference beyond Westport and Fairfield County.

Gault Inc., partnered with Polar Bears International (PBI) last year and Sam Gault has made energy conservation and education about global warming and the plight of the polar bear the cornerstone of Gault's corporate mission.

Earlier this week, Gault-PBI announced that Fallon Murphy, a 15-year-old Redding teen, has been selected to become Fairfield County's Arctic Ambassador. The Arctic Ambassadors program identifies outstanding teens worldwide, whose leadership skills and commitment to global environmental issues uniquely qualify them to engage their local communities in the fight against global warming and the race to save the polar bear.

Murphy will begin her educational work today as part of Polar Bear Empathy Day at Westport's Camp Mahackeno. Kids will hear from Fallon how global warming impacts the polar bear's habitat; witness members of the Polar Bear Empathy team wearing white down jackets to simulate the plight of the polar bear; will be given the "Degrees of Comfort" energy conservation

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guide; meet Polar Bear Empathy Team mascot, Polar Paulie; and will be given various footprints -- when it comes times to discuss how they will seek to reduce their carbon footprint in their parents' homes, they will be given smaller footprints.

Fallon became the Gault-PBI arctic ambassador of Fairfield County after writing an essay and being interviewed by a selection committee of three, which consisted of John Horkel, executive director of Earthplace, Amy Riggio of Westport-based Builders Beyond Borders, and Katya

Strage, the first arctic ambassador of Fairfield County.

Youth can make a difference in this world. In fact, it was a young child on the news that inspired Sam Gault to do something to help the plight of the polar bears. The father of two school-aged children was moved when he saw a young girl who requested that her parents turn down the thermostat in their Fairfield home by 1 degree to preserve the polar bear's diminishing habitat. That sparked his decision to get involved and partner with PBI.

Gault has since been to Churchill, Manitoba, Canada and has seen the polar bears up close. He went there in November as a guest of PBI and was literally a few feet away from some of the polar bears. He saw 50 to 60 of them.

"It was a very interesting experience," he said. "It brings it all home as to what we're doing here in Fairfield County, trying to educate people. The polar bear is the ultimate living symbol of global warming."

Gault said the polar bears don't eat for months when it is warm out, so it is important they get their food in the sea -- below the ice -- when temperatures are the coldest. However, the disappearing ice is making it harder and harder for the polar bears to get the food they need. There aren't really any other animals in the Tundra -- on land -- that the polar bears can eat, said Gault, so when the time comes, they congregate to the southwest corner of Hudson Bay (where Gault visited) and wait for the ice to freeze. In the time he was out there in November, Gault said he saw eight football-field-length sheets of ice form in about five days.

As an arctic ambassador, Fallon will be heading north to visit the area in September. She will be joined by 15 others from around the world at PBI's prestigious Leadership Camp and will spend a week working alongside leading scientists, educators, photographers and filmmakers to study polar bears in their native habitat. Fallon will create and maintain a daily blog to share her experiences and, upon her return, will launch an ambitious campaign to inspire her peers, as well as younger children, to be green leaders in their communities.

While there will be a new teen in Fairfield County designated as an arctic ambassador next year, anyone designated an arctic ambassador in any given year remains one for life, according to a Gault representative. That's OK with Fallon.

"I think I'm going to continue to [educate people] for the rest of my life," she said.



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Fallon said being chosen to be an arctic ambassador is a great honor. She hopes there will be a day soon when technology advances to the point where natural resources can be used in a way that won't affect the Earth.

Gault is glad he was inspired by the girl who wanted her parents to turn down the thermostat.

"It's a different way to give back," he said.

He said he feels that if everyone paid a little bit more attention to reducing their carbon footprint, the changes in the arctic might not be as drastic as they have been. The sea ice has been melting at an alarming rate and scientists predict that global warming may render the arctic inhabitable for polar bears within 20 years, he said.

While global warming may not be preventable, it can be slowed with education, Gault said. The Gault-PBI Alliance has released a "Degrees of Comfort" energy conservation guide which includes tips on how to stay cool, or keep warm, naturally, rather than, for example, being quick to turn on the air conditioning or upping the thermostat in one's home.

One tip, for someone who is hot, is to "wet your wrists and other pulse points with cold water." The guide notes that this can reduce your core body temperature by as much as three degrees, the relief is almost immediate and will last for up to one hour.

As for reducing one's carbon footprint, the guide recommends, among other things, carpooling; replacing your current washing machine with a low-energy, low-water use machine; turning off your TV, DVD player, VCR, stereo, computer and other small appliances when not using them.

It also reminds people not to give energy away, noting, "If you caulk and weather-strip around doors and windows to plug up leaks, you can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 1,000 pounds a year."

These are just a few of the recommendations in the Gault-PBI energy conservation guide. They sound simple but if everyone followed all of the recommendations and suggestions, including planting trees (that can transform CO2 back into oxygen) to offset the amount of CO2 a family produces, then the earth would be in better shape and the polar bears might not be on the verge of extinction.

Gault said following these recommendations will not only save a homeowner money but will also help the community and the entire planet.

For more information on how to conserve energy and help the polar bears, log onto www.gault-pbi.com



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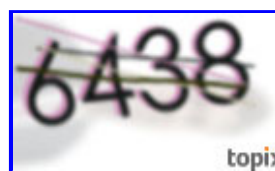
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